Characters

- MARGE
- MAMA
- PORTER
- MRS˙ CARTER

PLACE

A very small town in the South.

TIME

The present.

Act

SCENE A railway station waiting room. The room is divided in two sections by a low railing. Upstage center is a double door which serves as an entrance to both sides of the room. Over the doorway stage right is a sign "Colored," over the doorway stage left is another sign "White." Stage right are two doors ... one marked "Colored men" ... the other "Colored women." Stage left two other doorways are "White ladies" and "White gentlemen." There are two benches, one on each side. The room is drab and empty looking. Through the double doors upstage center can be seen a gray lighting which gives the effect of an early evening and open platform.

At rise of curtain the stage remains empty for about twenty seconds ... A middle aged Negro woman enters, looks offstage ... then crosses to the "Colored" side and sits on the bench. A moment later she is followed by a young Negro woman about twenty-one years old. She is carrying a large new cardboard suitcase and a wrapped shoebox. She is wearing a shoulder strap bag and a newspaper protrudes from the flap. She crosses to the "Colored" side and rests the suitcase at her feet as she looks at her mother with mild annoyance.

MARGE

You didn't have to get here so early, mama. Now you got to wait!

MAMA

If I'm goin' someplace ... I like to get there in plenty time. You don't have to stay.

MARGE

You shouldn't wait 'round here alone.

MAMA

I ain't scared. Ain't a soul going to bother me.

MARGE

I got to get back to Ted. He don't like to be in the house by himself.

(*She picks up the bag and places it on the bench by MAMA*.)

MAMA

You'd best go back.

(*smiles*)

You know I think he misses Florence.

MARGE

He's just a little fellow. He needs his mother. You make her come home! She shouldn't be way up there in Harlem. She ain't got nobody there.

MAMA

You know Florence don't like the South.

MARGE

It ain't what we like in this world! You tell her that.

MAMA

If Mr˙ Jack ask about the rent, you tell him we gonna be a little late on account of the trip.

MARGE

I'll talk with him. Don't worry so about everything.

(*places suitcase on floor*)

What you carryin', mama ... bricks?

MAMA

If Mr˙ Jack won't wait ... write to Rudley. He oughta send a little somethin'.

MARGE

Mama ... Rudley ain't got nothin' fo himself. I hate to ask him to give us.

MAMA

That's your brother! If push come to shove, we got to ask.

MARGE

(*places box on bench*)

Don't forget to eat your lunch ... and try to get a seat near the window so you can lean on your elbow and get a little rest.

MAMA

Hmmmm ... mmmph. Yes.

MARGE

Buy yourself some coffee when the man comes through. You'll need something hot and you can't go to the diner

MAMA

I know that. You talk like I'm a northern greenhorn.

MARGE

You got handkerchiefs?

MAMA

I got everything, Marge.

MARGE

(*wanders upstage to the railing division line*)

I know Florence is real bad off or she wouldn't call on us for money. Make her come home. She ain't gonna get rich up there and we can't afford to do for her.

MAMA

We talked all of that before.

MARGE

(*touches rail*)

Well, you got to be strict on her. She got notions a Negro woman don't need.

MAMA

But she was in a real play. Didn't she send us twenty-five dollars a week?

MARGE

For two weeks.

MAMA

Well the play was over.

MARGE

(*crosses to MAMA and sits beside her*)

It's not money, Mama. Sarah wrote us about it. You know what she said Florence was doin'. Sweepin' the stage!

MAMA

She was in the play!

MARGE

Sure she was in it! Sweepin'! Them folks ain't gonna let her be no actress. You tell her to wake up.

MAMA

I ... I ... think.

MARGE

Listen, Mama ... She won't wanna come. We know that ... but she gotta!

MAMA

Maybe we shoulda told her to expect me. It's kind of mean to just walk in like this.

MARGE

I bet she's livin' terrible. What's the matter with her? Don't she know we're keepin' her son?

MAMA

Florence don't feel right 'bout down here since Jim got killed.

MARGE

Who does? I should be the one goin' to get her. You tell her she ain't gonna feel right in no place. Mama, honestly! She must think she's white!

MAMA

Florence is brownskin.

MARGE

I don't mean that. I'm talkin' about her attitude. Didn't she go to Strumley's down here and ask to be a salesgirl?

(*rises*)

Now ain't that somethin'? They don't hire no Colored folks.

MAMA

Others beside Florence been talkin' about their rights.

MARGE

I know it ... but there's things we can't do cause they ain't gonna let us.

(*She wanders over to the "White" side of the stage*.)

Don't feel a damn bit different over here than it does on our side.

(*silence*)

MAMA

Maybe we shoulda just sent her the money this time. This one time.

MARGE

(*coming back to the "Colored" side*)

Mama! Don't you let her cash that check for nothin' but to bring her back home.

MAMA

I know.

MARGE

(*restless ... fidgets with her hair ... patting it in place*)

I oughta go now.

MAMA

You best get back to Ted. He might play with the lamp.

MARGE

He better not let me catch him! If you got to go to the ladies' room take your grip.

MAMA

I'll be alright. Make Ted get up on time for school.

MARGE

(*kisses her quickly and gives her the newspaper*)

Here's something to read. So long, Mama.

MAMA

G'bye, Margie baby.

MARGE

(*goes to door ... stops and turns to her mother*)

You got your smelling salts?

MAMA

In my pocketbook.

MARGE

(*wistfully*)

Tell Florence I love her and miss her too.

PORTER

(*can be heard singing in the distance*)

MAMA

Sure.

MARGE

(*reluctant to leave*)

Pin that check in your bosom, Mama. You might fall asleep and somebody'll rob you.

MAMA

I got it pinned to me.

(*feels for the check which is in her blouse*)

MARGE

(*almost pathetic*)

Bye, Ma.

MAMA

(*sits for a moment looking at her surroundings. She opens the paper and begins to read*.)

PORTER

(*offstage*)

Hello, Marge. What you doin' down here?

MARGE

I came to see Mama off.

PORTER

Where's she going?

MARGE

She's in there; she'll tell you. I got to get back to Ted.

PORTER

Bye now ... Say, wait a minute, Marge.

MARGE

Yes?

PORTER

I told Ted he could have some of my peaches and he brought all them Brandford boys and they picked 'em all. I wouldn't lay a hand on him but I told him I was gonna tell you.

MARGE

I'm gonna give it to him!

PORTER

(*enters and crosses to white side of waiting room. He carries a pail of water and a mop. He is about fifty years old. He is obviously tired but not lazy*.)

Every peach off my tree!

MAMA

There wasn't but six peaches on that tree.

PORTER

(*smiles ... glances at MAMA as he crosses to the "White" side and begins to mop*)

How d'ye do, Mrs˙ Whitney ... you going on a trip?

MAMA

Fine, I thank you. I'm going to New York.

PORTER

Wish it was me. You gonna stay?

MAMA

No, Mr˙ Brown. I'm bringing Florence ... I'm visiting Florence.

PORTER

Tell her I said hello. She's a fine girl.

MAMA

Thank you.

PORTER

My brother Bynum's in Georgia now.

MAMA

Well now, that's nice.

PORTER

Atlanta.

MAMA

He goin' to school?

PORTER

Yes'm. He saw Florence in a Colored picture. A moving picture.

MAMA

Do tell! She didn't say a word about it.

PORTER

They got Colored moving picture theaters in Atlanta.

MAMA

Yes. Your brother going to be a doctor?

PORTER

(*with pride*)

No. He writes things.

MAMA

Oh.

PORTER

My son is goin' back to Howard next year.

MAMA

Takes an awful lot of goin' to school to be anything. Lot of money leastways.

PORTER

(*thoughtfully*)

Yes'm, it sure do.

MAMA

That sure was a nice church sociable the other night.

PORTER

Yes'm. We raised 87 dollars.

MAMA

That's real nice.

PORTER

I won your cake at the bazaar.

MAMA

The chocolate one?

PORTER

(*as he wrings mop*)

Yes'm ... was light as a feather. That old train is gonna be late this evenin'. It's number 42.

MAMA

I don't mind waitin'.

PORTER

(*lifts pail, tucks mop handle under his arm. He looks about in order to make certain no one is around and leans over and addresses MAMA in a confidential tone*.)

Did you buy your ticket from that Mr˙ Daly?

MAMA

(*in a low tone*)

No. Marge bought it yesterday.

PORTER

(*leaning against railing*)

That's good. That man is real mean. Especially if he thinks you're goin' north.

(*He starts to leave ... then turns back to MAMA*)

If you go to the rest room, use the Colored men's ... the other one is out of order.

MAMA

Thank you, sir.

MRS. CARTER

(*A white woman ... well dressed, wearing furs and carrying a small, expensive overnight bag breezes in ... breathless ... flustered and smiling. She addresses the PORTER as she almost collides with him*)

Boy! My bags are out there. The taxi driver just dropped them. Will they be safe?

PORTER

Yes, mam. I'll see after them.

MRS. CARTER

I thought I'd missed the train.

PORTER

It's late, mam.

MRS. CARTER

(*crosses to bench on the "White" side and rests her bag*)

Fine! You come back here and get me when it comes. There'll be a tip in it for you.

PORTER

Thank you, mam. I'll be here.

(*as he leaves*)

Miss Whitney, I'll take care of your bag too.

MAMA

Thank you, sir.

MRS. CARTER

(*wheels around ... notices MAMA*)

Oh ... Hello there ...

MAMA

Howdy, mam.

(*She opens her newspaper and begins to read*.)

MRS. CARTER

(*paces up and down rather nervously. She takes a cigarette from her purse, lights it and takes a deep draw. She looks at her watch and then speaks to MAMA across the railing*.)

Have you any idea how late the train will be?

MAMA

No, mam.

(*starts to read again*)

MRS. CARTER

I can't leave this place fast enough. Two days of it and I'm bored to tears. Do you live here?

MAMA

(*rests paper on her lap*)

Yes, mam.

MRS. CARTER

Where are you going?

MAMA

New York City, mam.

MRS. CARTER

Good for you! You can stop "maming" me. My name is Mrs˙ Carter. I'm not a southerner really.

(*takes handkerchief from her purse and covers her nose for a moment*)

My God! Disinfectant! This is a frightful place. My brother's here writing a book. Wants atmosphere. Well, he's got it. I'll never come back here ever.

MAMA

That's too bad. mam ... Mrs˙ Carter.

MRS. CARTER

That's good. I'd die in this place. Really die. Jeff ... Mr˙ Wiley ... my brother ... He's tied in knots, a bundle of problems ... positively in knots.

MAMA

(*amazed*)

That so, mam?

MRS. CARTER

You don't have to call me mam. It's so southern. Mrs˙ Carter! These people are still fighting the Civil War. I'm really a New Yorker now. Of course, I was born here ... in the South I mean. Memphis. Listen ... am I annoying you? I've simply got to talk to someone.

MAMA

(*places her newspaper on the bench*)

No, Mrs˙ Carter. It's perfectly alright.

MRS. CARTER

Fine! You see Jeff has ceased writing. Stopped! Just like that!

(*snaps fingers*)

MAMA

(*turns to her*)

That so?

MRS. CARTER

Yes. The reviews came out on his last book. Poor fellow.

MAMA

I'm sorry, mam ... Mrs˙ Carter. They didn't like his book?

MRS. CARTER

Well enough ... but Jeff's ... well, Mr˙ Wiley is a genius. He says they missed the point! Lost the whole message! Did you read ... do you ... have you heard of *Lost My Lonely Way*?

MAMA

No, mam. I can't say I have.

MRS. CARTER

Well, it doesn't matter. It's profound. Real ... you know.

(*stands at the railing upstage*)

It's about your people.

MAMA

That's nice.

MRS. CARTER

Jeff poured his complete self into it. Really delved into the heart of the problem, pulled no punches! He hardly stopped for his meals ... And of course I wasn't here to see that he didn't overdo. He suffers so with his characters.

MAMA

I guess he wants to do his best.

MRS. CARTER

Zelma! ... That's his heroine ... Zelma! A perfect character.

MAMA

(*interested ... coming out of her shell eagerly*)

She was colored, mam?

MRS. CARTER

Oh yes! ... But of course you don't know what it's about do you?

MAMA

No, miss ... Would you tell me?

MRS. CARTER

(*leaning on the railing*)

Well ... she's almost white, see? Really you can't tell except in small ways. She wants to be a lawyer ... and ... and ... well, there she is full of complexes and this deep shame you know.

MAMA

(*excitedly but with curiosity*)

Do tell! What shame has she got?

MRS. CARTER

(*takes off her fur neckpiece and places it on bench with overnight bag*)

It's obvious! This lovely creature ... intelligent, ambitious, and well ... she's a Negro!

MAMA

(*waiting eagerly*)

Yes'm, you said that ...

MRS. CARTER

Surely you understand? She's constantly hating herself. Just before she dies she says it! ... Right on the bridge ...

MAMA

(*genuinely moved*)

How sad. Ain't it a shame she had to die?

MRS. CARTER

It was inevitable ... couldn't be any other way!

MAMA

What did she say on the bridge?

MRS. CARTER

Well ... just before she jumped ...

MAMA

(*slowly straightening*)

You mean she killed *herself*?

MRS. CARTER

Of course. Close your eyes and picture it!

MAMA

(*turns front and closes her eyes tightly with enthusiasm*)

Yes'm.

MRS. CARTER

(*center stage on "White" side*)

Now ...! She's standing on the bridge in the moonlight ... Out of her shabby purse she takes a mirror ... and by the light of the moon she looks at her reflection in the glass.

MAMA

(*clasps her hands together gently*)

I can see her just as plain.

MRS. CARTER

(*sincerely*)

Tears roll down her cheeks as she says ... almost! almost white ... hut I'm black! I'm a Negro! and then ...

(*turns to MAMA*)

she jumps and drowns herself!

MAMA

(*opens her eyes and speaks quietly*)

Why?

MRS. CARTER

She can't face it! Living in a world where she almost belongs but not quite.

(*drifts upstage*)

Oh it's so ... so ... tragic.

MAMA

(*carried away by her convictions ... not anger ... she feels challenged. She rises*.)

That ain't so! Not one bit it ain't!

MRS. CARTER

(*surprised*)

But it is!

MAMA

(*During the following she works her way around the railing until she crosses over about one foot to the "White" side and is face to face with MRS˙ CARTER*.)

I know it ain't! Don't my friend Essie Kitredge daughter look just like a German or somethin'? She didn't kill herself! She's teachin' the third grade in the colored school right here. Even the bus drivers ask her to sit in the front seats cause they think she's white! ... an' ... an' ... she just says as clear as you please ... "I'm sittin' where my people got to sit by law. I'm a Negro woman!"

MRS. CARTER

(*uncomfortable and not knowing why*)

... But there you have it. The exception makes the rule. That's proof!

MAMA

No such thing! My cousin Hemsly's as white as you! ... an' ... an' he never ...

MRS. CARTER

(*flushed with anger ... yet lost ... because she doesn't know why*)

Are you losing your temper?

(*weakly*)

Are you angry with me?

MAMA

(*stands silently trembling as she looks down and notices she is on the wrong side of the railing. She looks up at the "White Ladies Room" sign and slowly works her way back to the "Colored" side. She feels completely lost*.)

No, *mam*. Excuse me please.

(*with bitterness*)

I just meant Hemsly works in the colored section of the shoe store ... He never once wanted to kill his self!

(*She sits down on the bench and fumbles for her newspaper. Silence*.)

MRS. CARTER

(*Caught between anger and reason ... she laughs nervously*.)

Well! Let's not be upset by this. It's entirely my fault you know. This whole thing is a completely controversial subject.

(*silence*)

If it's too much for Jeff ... well naturally I shouldn't discuss it with you.

(*approaching railing*)

I'm sorry. Let *me* apologize.

MAMA

(*keeps her eyes on the paper*)

No need for that, mam.

(*silence*)

MRS. CARTER

(*painfully uncomfortable*)

I've drifted away from ... What started all of this?

MAMA

(*no comedy intended or allowed on this line*)

Your brother, mam.

MRS. CARTER

(*trying valiantly to brush away the tension*)

Yes ... Well, I had to come down and sort of hold his hand over the reviews. He just thinks too much ... and studies. He knows the Negro so well that sometimes our friends tease him and say he almost *seems* like ... well you know ...

MAMA

(*tightly*)

Yes'm.

MRS. CARTER

(*slowly walks over to the "Colored" side near the top of the rail*)

You know I try but it's really difficult to understand you people. However ... I keep trying.

MAMA

(*still tight*)

Thank you, mam.

MRS. CARTER

(*retreats back to "White" side and begins to prove herself*)

Last week ... Why do you know what I did? I sent a thousand dollars to a Negro college for scholarships.

MAMA

That was right kind of you.

MRS. CARTER

(*almost pleading*)

I know what's going on in your mind ... and what you're thinking is wrong. I've ... I've ... eaten with Negroes.

MAMA

Yes, mam.

MRS. CARTER

(*trying to find a straw*)

... And there's Malcom! If it weren't for the guidance of Jeff he'd never written his poems. Malcom is a Negro.

MAMA

(*freezing*)

Yes, mam.

MRS. CARTER

(*gives up, crosses to her bench, opens her overnight bag and takes out a book and begins to read. She glances at MAMA from time to time. MAMA is deeply absorbed in her newspaper. MRS˙ CARTER closes her book with a bang ... determined to penetrate the wall MAMA has built around her*.)

Why are you going to New York?

MAMA

(*almost accusingly*)

I got a daughter there.

MRS. CARTER

I lost my son in the war.

(*silence ... MAMA is ill at ease*.)

Your daughter ... what is she doing ... studying?

MAMA

No'm, she's trying to get on stage.

MRS. CARTER

(*pleasantly*)

Oh ... a singer?

MAMA

No, mam. She's ...

MRS. CARTER

(*warmly*)

You people have such a gift. I love spirituals ... "Steal Away," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

MAMA

They are right nice. But Florence wants to act. Just say things in plays.

MRS. CARTER

A dramatic actress?

MAMA

Yes, that's what it is. She been in a colored moving picture, and a big show for two weeks on Broadway.

MRS. CARTER

The dear, precious child! ... But this is funny ... no! it's pathetic. She must be bitter ... *really* bitter. Do you know what I do?

MAMA

I can't rightly say.

MRS. CARTER

I'm an actress! A dramatic actress ... And I haven't really worked in six months ... And I'm pretty well-known ... And everyone knows Jeff. I'd like to work. Of course, there are my committees, but you see, they don't need

me. Not really ... not even Jeff.

MAMA

Now that's a shame.

MRS. CARTER

Now your daughter ... you must make her stop before she's completely unhappy. Make her stop!

MAMA

Yes'm ... why?

MRS. CARTER

I have the best of contacts and I've only done a few *broadcasts* lately. Of course, I'm not counting the things I just wouldn't do. Your daughter ... make her stop.

MAMA

A drama teacher told her she has real talent.

MRS. CARTER

A drama teacher! My dear woman, there are loads of unscrupulous whites up there that just hand out opinions for ...

MAMA

This was a colored gentleman down here.

MRS. CARTER

Oh well! ... And she went up there on the strength of that? This makes me very unhappy.

(*puts book away in case, and snaps lock. silence*)

MAMA

(*getting an idea*)

Do you really, truly feel that way, mam?

MRS. CARTER

I do. Please ... I want you to believe me.

MAMA

Could I ask you something?

MRS. CARTER

Anything.

MAMA

You won't be angry, mam?

MRS. CARTER

(*remembering*)

I won't. I promise you.

MAMA

(*gathering courage*)

Florence is proud ... but she's having it hard.

MRS. CARTER

I'm sure she is.

MAMA

Could you help her out some, mam? Knowing all the folks you do ... maybe ...

MRS. CARTER

(*rubs the outside of the case*)

Well ... it isn't that simple ... but ... you're very sweet. If only I could ...

MAMA

Anything you did, I feel grateful. I don't like to tell it, but she can't even pay her rent and things. And she's used to my cooking for her ... I believe my girl goes hungry sometime up there ... and yet she'd like to stay so bad.

MRS. CARTER

(*looks up, resting case on her knees*)

How can I refuse? You seem like a good woman.

MAMA

Always lived as best I knew how and raised my children up right. We got a fine family, mam.

MRS. CARTER

And I've no family at all. I've got to! It's clearly my duty. Jeff's books ... guiding Malcom's poetry ... It isn't enough ... oh I know it isn't. Have you ever heard of Melba Rugby?

MAMA

No, mam. I don't know anybody much ... except right here.

MRS. CARTER

(*brightening*)

She's in California, but she's moving East again ... hates California.

MAMA

Yes'm.

MRS. CARTER

A most versatile woman. Writes, directs, acts ... everything!

MAMA

That's nice, mam.

MRS. CARTER

Well, she's uprooting herself and coming back to her first home ... New York ... to direct "Love Flowers" ... it's a musical.

MAMA

Yes'm.

MRS. CARTER

She's grand ... helped so many people ... and I'm sure she'll help your ... what's her name.

MAMA

Florence.

MRS. CARTER

(*turns back to bench, opens bag, takes out a pencil and an address book*)

Yes, Florence. She'll have to *make* a place for her.

MAMA

Bless you, mam.

MRS. CARTER

(*holds handbag steady on rail as she uses it to write on*)

Now let's see ... the best thing to do would be to give you the telephone number ... since you're going there.

MAMA

Yes'm.

MRS. CARTER

(*writing address on paper*)

Your daughter will love her ... and if she's a deserving girl ...

MAMA

(*looking down as MRS˙ CARTER writes*)

She's a good child. Never a bit of trouble. Except about her husband, and neither one of them could help that.

MRS. CARTER

(*stops writing, raises her head questioning*)

Oh?

MAMA

He got killed at voting time. He was a good man.

MRS. CARTER

(*embarrassed*)

I guess that's worse than losing him in the war.

MAMA

We all got our troubles passing through here.

MRS. CARTER

(*gives her the address*)

Tell your dear girl to call this number about a week from now.

MAMA

Yes, mam.

MRS. CARTER

Her experience won't matter with Melba. I know she'll understand. I'll call her too.

MAMA

Thank you, mam.

MRS. CARTER

I'll just tell her ... no heavy washing or ironing ... just light cleaning and a little cooking ... does she cook?

MAMA

Mam?

(*slowly backs away from MRS˙ CARTER and sits down on bench*)

MRS. CARTER

Don't worry, that won't matter to Melba.

(*silence, moves around the rail to "Colored'" side, leans over MAMA*)

I'd take your daughter myself, but I've got Binnie. She's been with me for years, and I just can't let her go ... can I?

MAMA

(*looks at MRS˙ CARTER closely*)

No, mam.

MRS. CARTER

Of course she must be steady. I couldn't ask Melba to take a fly-by-night.

(*touches MAMA's arm*)

But she'll have her own room and bath, and above all ... security.

MAMA

(*reaches out, clutches MRS˙ CARTER'S wrist almost pulling her off balance*)

Child!

MRS. CARTER

(*frightened*)

You're hurting my wrist.

MAMA

(*looks down, realizes how tight she's clutching her, and releases her wrist*)

I mustn't hurt you, must I.

MRS. CARTER

(*backing away rubbing her wrist*)

It's all right.

MAMA

(*rises*)

You better get over on the other side of that rail. It's against the law for you to be over here with me.

MRS. CARTER

(*frightened and uncomfortable*)

If you think so.

MAMA

I don't want to break the law.

MRS. CARTER

(*keeps her eye on MAMA as she drifts around railing to bench on her side, gathers overnight bag*)

I know I must look like a fright. The train should be along soon. When it comes, I won't see you until New York. These silly laws.

(*silence*)

I'm going to powder my nose.

(*exits into "White ladies" room*

PORTER

(*singing offstage*)

MAMA

(*sits quietly, staring in front of her ... then looks at the address for a moment ... tears the paper into little bits and lets them flutter to the floor. She opens the suitcase, takes out notebook, an envelope and a pencil. She writes a few words on the paper*.)

PORTER

(*enters with broom and dust pan*)

Number 42 will be coming along in nine minutes.

(*When MAMA doesn't answer him, he looks up and watches her. She reaches in her bosom, unpins the check, smooths it out, places it in the envelope with the letter. She closes the suitcase*.)

I said the train's coming. Where's the lady?

MAMA

She's in the *ladies'* room. You got a stamp?

PORTER

No. But I can get one out of the machine. Three for a dime.

MAMA

(*hands him the letter*)

Put one on here and mail it for me.

PORTER

(*looks at it*)

Gee ... you writing Florence when you're going to see her?

MAMA

(*picks up the shoebox and puts it back on the bench*)

You want a good lunch? It's chicken and fruit.

PORTER

Sure ... thank you ... but you won't ...

MAMA

(*rises, paces up and down*)

I ain't gonna see Florence for a long time. Might be never.

PORTER

How's that, Mrs˙ Whitney?

MAMA

She can be anything in the world she wants to be! That's her right. Marge can't make her turn back, Mrs˙ Carter can't make her cum back. *Lost My Lonely Way*! That's a book! People killing theyselves 'cause they look white but be black. They just don't know do they, Mr˙ Brown?

PORTER

Whatever happened don't you fret none. Life is too short.

MAMA

Oh, I'm gonna fret plenty! You know what I wrote Florence?

PORTER

No, mam. But you don't have to tell me.

MAMA

I said "Keep trying." ... Oh, I'm going home.

PORTER

I'll take your bag.

(*picks up bag and starts out*)

Come on, Mrs˙ Whitney.

(*PORTER exits*)

(*MAMA moves around to "White" side, stares at sign over door. She starts to knock on "White Ladies" door, but changes her mind. As she turns to leave, her eye catches the railing; she approaches it gently, touches it, turns, exits. Stage is empty for about six or seven seconds. Sound of train whistle is heard in the distance. Slow curtain*.)

CURTAIN